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Guide

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A Catholic Neurosis?

Changing Church (2)

Church Renewal

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A Community Transformed

Responding to the needs of men in our world and faithful to the insights given us through the Council by the Holy Spirit, a renewed Church must expect and prepare for changes on an enormous scale. We have only begun to listen to the agonizing cries of men today and have only a rudimentary grasp of the ways in which we should serve them. And we are only on the threshold of understanding the full implications of the changes in Catholic outlook and practice inherent in the Council documents.

Criticisms of the slow pace of change, and of the limited areas in which accommodations have occurred are sometimes strident. But they are less harmful than the mutterings of those who think change is occurring too rapidly, or even that it has already gone far enough.

Debates about celibacy, experiments in the liturgy or the apostolate, authority and obedience and the rest are not the main issue. What is really at stake is aptly described by Mr. John Horgan: "The crisis we are going through can be seen not so much as a crisis of authority as what Father John Courtney Murray has called a 'crisis of community.' It is a crisis because the different members of the community are in the process of a fairly radical transformation and until that transformation has become a reality there will continue to be turbulence, anger, disappointment and fear. The re-discovery of the Church as a community is a fact, but it is not yet—certainly not for the majority of Catholics—an experience, a reality.

"It will be some time before this is achieved, before we arrive at a measure of agreed stability which will reflect the most important, most authentic and alive features of the transitional period without incorporating its inevitable excesses. And the only way in which we can ensure this is by insistence on the three essentials for the proper functioning of any community: dialogue, honesty and freedom."

John T. McGinn, C.S.P.

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A Catholic Neurosis?

Dom Sebastian Moore

The subject of this essay is a delicate one. I want only to express a conviction that has grown on me in recent years: that one encounters among Catholics certain ways of behaving in the exchanges of social life: that these ways of behaving can be understood in the light of a certain hypothesis: that this hypothesis is that of a neurosis found in Catholics at the present time. My plan is to give a random list of the phenomena, then to suggest what is the root of the trouble.

To begin with, let it be clear that the case for a Catholic neurosis cannot be scientifically established. It will always be possible to reduce the phenomena listed to other causes, or even to deny their existence. The following suggestion is therefore only in the realm of hypothesis. It is offered only on the understanding that self-criticism is a good thing, that the difficulty often is to know *how* to criticize oneself relevantly, and that therefore any suggestion may be welcome.

Here, then, is the list. A tendency on the part of us priests to be allergic to frank discussion on matters which are at once important and personal, ranging from sex to real difficulties with the faith. The effect is that people encounter, at a certain point, a barrier which is not so much the limit of orthodoxy as the limit of the priest's willingness to talk as a man. They feel that 'he wouldn't say that if he were free'; and 'free' here does not mean 'uncommitted to the faith and practice of the Church' but, well perhaps 'free *in* that faith and practice, made free *by* that faith and practice.' More often than not, the preferred alternative is to keep right off important subjects and to cultivate a sort of impersonal *bon-*

homie — a tendency especially marked in clerical gatherings.

A certain unsatisfactoriness encountered in religious institutions by laymen in their employ. Whether the laymen are right in saying 'I shouldn't be treated that way by a secular body' is not really the point. The point is that they do say it, often, and that they may be right, so that we have here a hint which, in the terms of this article, I cannot afford to ignore. Often they are struck by an absence of straightness in the conduct of affairs. When something needs correcting, the person concerned is not told, but others are, and in general things are handled obliquely. Occasionally the layman encounters something like hysteria. I heard of someone the other day, employed in a large school run by religious. There were complaints about what was considered excessive frankness in his teaching on sex. His interview with the headmaster was perfectly amicable, but at the end of it the headmaster said to him, 'I believe Fr X has something to say to you.' Fr X then appeared and, in the presence of the headmaster, accused the man, in most intemperate language, of corrupting the young, poisoning the wells, etc.!

A tendency for young Catholics to remain strangely immature. A priest friend of mine asked some Catholic girls at the university for their ideas about marriage, and the unanimous reply was: 'I don't want to marry a Catholic. Catholic boys are so immature.' He then got exactly the

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same reply from Catholic boys about Catholic girls!

A tendency to blow up simple things to tragic dimensions. Pamela, aged twelve, writes to a friend at another school. In the course of a chatty letter about Elvis Presley, Adam Faith, and the musicals she saw last holidays, she remarks that life at school is 'deathlike,' always the same faces, how she envies her friend being at a day-school, etc. The letter is read by the Reverend Mother, who sends it to Pamela's mother with a covering letter in which she wonders whether Pamela's attitude is 'sincere' or 'merely a pose.' If it is a pose, she says, it is surely a most unpleasing one. The letter is supposed to show 'a most undesirable trait' in the girl's character, an attitude that is very hurting in view of the efforts made to entertain the girls.

Now, what all the examples show is this. Something seems to be inhibiting a direct and simple approach to the routine problems that life puts up. What I am going to suggest is that this inhibiting factor is liable to be a feature of the Catholic mind.

PERSONAL DISCOVERY

Every man needs some ideas, some principles for interpreting life to him and for guiding him in its conduct. But there needs to be some *balance* between this ideal structure and the unique life which it is guiding. A man needs to 'realize' his ideas, to feed into them a personal discovery of their meaning and usefulness. Now with the Catholic, this ideal structure is most imposing. It is the creation of Christian faith working in great and holy minds, bringing forth their best insights. From the meditations of Augustine, from the speculations of Aquinas, and from numberless other sources, there has been built up this great body of objective truth. The effect is peculiarly accumulative in the Church, whose law it is that every significant Christian insight feeds and increases a common mind. And whether or not your individual Catholic is overtly aware of all that he carries, he does carry it. At moments he will surprise his non-Catholic friend by showing

an astounding *certainly* about life and death and God and after-death, problems about which the greatest minds have anguished without conclusion. Now, this effortless certainty is a wonderful thing, and I have sometimes pointed to it, while instructing a convert, as showing the real meaning of infallibility. Still, if I am right in saying there must be some balance between a man's ideal structure and his life as experienced, there is going to be a serious imbalance in the case of the Catholic. Between him and what *he* feels and, fumblingly thinks about life — 'life' meaning girls, money, marriage, fun and drudgery — there comes what great and noble souls have thought about it, twice-born souls who have seen the true perspectives and made the consequent sacrifice. So he oscillates between two standards. This oscillation is not the same thing as the tension between good and evil, between the dictates of conscience and the importunities of the flesh. It is a division of the mind rather than of the will. It is better described as a neurosis than as a straight spiritual conflict. And it is the Catholic ideal structure, getting between the individual and his rudimentary common sense, that tends to inhibit a commonsense approach to the problems of daily living.

THE NATURAL VIRTUES

The neurosis will be more active in those whose manner of life commits them more closely to the Church, and that is why the symptoms I have listed are those shown by us religious. This is hard saying and takes no account of the numberless souls who have grown, in religious and priestly life, into fine men and women. But I'm not writing about them. I'm not even writing about the redeeming feature (in the strong theological sense) in our own lives. I'm writing about the other side of the picture. I want to understand why it is that a religious community may fail, sometimes to an alarming degree, to develop the natural virtues of community life. After all, it is this sort of thing that our layman in religious employ finds himself up against. He misses in his employers a type of straight dealing and sanity that is more easily found

among men not embarrassed by supernatural awareness. And I want us priests to ask ourselves: Am I such a small man that I cannot worthily represent to others an infallible and inflexible authority? And let us avoid the stop-thought that immediately offers itself: of course no one is worthy

"CATHOLIC PESSIMISM"

This division to which the Catholic soul is liable can have many effects. The principal of these is apathy, or what a seminary professor of my acquaintance once referred to as 'Catholic pessimism.' He was speaking of the seminary itself where the ideal structure is built up in all its imposing coherence. The effect of being continually exposed to the truth which is doing one no good is distressing to the soul. There can even result a kind of unbelief, an exhaustion of the spirit, which is all the worse for being partly unconscious. In this connection we ought to look up what the old masters have to tell us about accidie, which may be loosely rendered as 'spiritual bloodymindedness.'

And outside the seminary! The young teenagers who go straight from a Catholic school into the factory, what of them, what is in their minds, what *can* be there? What relation will there be between the formulas they have learned and the life they are beginning to discover?

Well, we might take one example: the young man struggling with masturbation. Masturbation is radically an immature practice, and the proper function of grace just here is to help him to outgrow a boyish habit. Probably the habit survives, as a sort of pocket of immaturity, in a life that is otherwise developing well enough: so that our young man is a *man* at his drawing-board or on the shop floor, and a small boy in his bedroom — *and in the confessional*. That is the point. Somehow, the way he thinks about his struggle religiously arrests it at its juvenile stage. Nor is it difficult to see why this is. His religion tells him that what he does is a mortal sin — worthy of eternal damnation and so presumably a rather adult affair. A good counsellor

would tell him it is an immaturity. These two considerations do not easily combine. So he will choose to continue the struggle, week by week, exclusively in religious terms, and so preclude the natural light that he really needs. This phenomenon is relevant to our subject. It is an instance of how the Catholic ideal structure can be too much for the individual — in this case the full analysis of an act in terms of human destiny has prevented its being understood in its personal context. It is not *himself* that the young man has brought into the confessional, but a timid Catholic soul, a soul that will continue to give the same sort of account of itself at thirty, forty and sixty when, as an important and responsible businessman, he will be confessing disobedience. And thus it is that Catholic religion can have, *materialiter*, the same effect on the young as the vast mass of salacious literature available on all bookstalls — for this is nothing but a commercial racket for keeping us all at the adolescent stage.

TANGLED ROOTS

What is the remedy for all this? First of all, perhaps we should not be too hasty to blame ourselves but should recognize the problem as something bigger than we could have created by our imprudence and inertia. There is a sense in which the Catholic Church has never really grappled with 'modern man' as he emerged from the break-up of medieval culture. The Reformation was a movement that started within the Church, lost its head, left the Church, and provoked in the Church a powerful reaction which culminated in the Counter-Reformation — the analogy with counter-revolution is not to be ignored. The Catholic of today is still waiting to enjoy that 'sanity in religion' which is to be found, mixed with heresy, in the reformed churches. The problem has roots deep in history, and so there is no easy solution. Once this is realized, we may proceed to make a few modest suggestions.

We must come to see what are the factors which accentuate the *rigidity* of the Catholic ideal structure, which prevents it from being assimilated, which cause its

truth to drown the soul rather than water it. I think immediately of two: polemics and the fossilization of the liturgy.

Polemics. The habit of thinking of Catholicism as something which we have got and the others haven't got has the curious effect of making us less conscious of what we really *have* got. Somehow the very strength which Catholic truth develops in conflict tends to alienate it from the soul. One can end up by presenting Catholic faith as the answer to a question that one has ceased to ask oneself. It is encouraging to know that the faith one is trying to give to our teenagers can hold its own against Bertrand Russell, but to give it to them one must be able to listen rather than to propound, to listen and be surprised as the soul of man speaks its needs in new accents.

LIVING LITURGY

Fossilization of the liturgy. A priest wants to be *with* his people. Above all he wants to be with them in the celebration of God's mysteries. He doesn't want Mass to accentuate the gap between the Catholic Thing and the Catholic man, with himself on the Thing-side of the gap. If one allows oneself to think, it is really nerve-racking to turn one's back on a congregation of dockers, seamen and teenagers, and proclaim (for all to hear, as the rubrics insist!) 'Os iusti meditabuntur sapientiam.' He might even have such rebellious thoughts as I'm tired of saying Mass. I want to take a service — which will be the Mass of course! Indeed the present rubrics illustrate well the tendency of the last centuries to take the Catholic Thing away from life and wrap it up into a tidy parcel containing all the essentials except what is essential for *us*. For the present Mass is an abstract of

the Mass-liturgy, flattening out its many dimensions into a single plain surface which only the expert can penetrate.

ERA OF REDISCOVERY

It looks as though the liturgical section of the coming Council [this was written in 1961] is envisaging radical reform, and, in general, it is clear that this is an age of fresh discovery, in which Catholic truth will manifest its life-giving rather than its conceptual properties. The object of this article is to stimulate a generous and open-minded response to these changes by pinpointing a long-standing *malaise*. I believe that there is such a *malaise*, and I want to keep my eye squarely on it and not get diverted into all the individual things that want reforming. There are moments when one seems to see so many things — the lapidary Latin declaimed to a pop-record congregation, the outlandish things one hears in the confessional from people one knows to be normal if a little dim, the twists and turns of politics in a religious house, the self-torture of nuns, the waspishness of Reverend Mothers — as parts of a single lunacy. There's very little real malice in the most unpleasant symptoms — the petty tyrannies, the roundabout approach to administrative problems, etc. It's just that we're such children. It is our faith that makes us so — and it shouldn't. It should make us men and women, marked with the Cross and sensing the Resurrection.

But it may be that the picture I have drawn, in which so many things are seen as symptoms of a neurosis, is itself neurotic. In which case, perhaps I have demonstrated the existence of the Catholic neurosis — by succumbing to it!

The Dimensions Of The Church (2)

Avery Dulles

The problem, how broad the Church is, is far from solved in contemporary theology. But Vatican II, by its surprising refusal to identify the Church of Christ exclusively with Roman Catholicism, has opened up new avenues of thought. In the Constitution on the Church we read that while the Church of Christ does subsist in the Roman Catholic communion, "many elements of sanctification and truth can be found outside her visible structure" (n. 8). This general principle lays the foundation for the doctrine of the "elements of the Church" set forth in the Decree on Ecumenism with reference to Christians of other denominations: "Some, even very many, of the most significant elements or endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church: the written word of God, the life of grace, faith, hope, and charity, along with other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit and visible elements"—most importantly, the sacraments (n. 3). As we shall see in chapter 2, this line of thought permits a very positive appraisal of the Churches and ecclesial communities separated from Rome.

In the case of non-Catholic Christianity, therefore, we should clearly recognize the presence of churchly realities outside the Catholic Church. These realities can include, in the case of Orthodox Christianity, a validly ordained priesthood and all the seven sacraments. Thus the separate Christian Churches and their members should not be considered as if they were simply separated from Christ, from the Church,

and from ourselves. All the authentic Christian elements existing among the various Churches are vital links and sources of spiritual unity.

From the Council's statements about non-Catholic Christianity we may conclude that the Church is not a simple quantity which is either wholly present or wholly absent. Rather, it is something which can be more or less realized, according to the measure in which God's saving work in Christ is believed and lived. This raises the further question, whether anything of the Church can be present where the gospel has not been preached or accepted. This question is obviously of immense significance for the dimensions of the Church. If the answer is no, we shall have to say that the Church is absent from most of the contemporary world, which is only one-third Christian. And yet it sounds farfetched to speak of a presence of the Church among men who do not even recognize Christ as their Saviour.

The Council did not directly discuss the presence of the Church in the non-Christian world. I shall, therefore, rely at this point on the speculations of several modern theologians who seem to me to be in line with

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the Council, but who deliberately seek to go beyond its express teaching.

Let us begin by considering the role of Christ. In the plan of God, He is the center of the universe. It is in Him that all creation has its full intelligibility. He is the Alpha which stands at the origin of all things, and the Omega—or goal—to which they tend. As we read in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "God's Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart, and the answer to all its yearnings" (n. 45).

ANONYMOUS CHRISTIANITY

In contemporary Catholic theology it is taken for granted that the saving grace of Christ is at work among all men, and hence is operative far beyond the limits of the institutional Church. Many theologians speak in this connection of "anonymous Christianity." By this they mean that men who have not heard, or do not consciously accept, the good news of the Christian gospel, and who perhaps do not even think of themselves as believers in God, may nevertheless be living by the grace of Christ when they follow the dictates of their conscience. If we grant the existence of such an "anonymous Christianity," we must further ask how it is related to the Church. Some would say that Christ's activity as risen Lord transcends that of His Body the Church, and that He is present where the Church has not yet arrived.

But this statement seems to reflect too narrow a view of the Church. I prefer to say with Schillebeeckx that "the acts of Christ in glory are the acts of the whole Christ, the integral Christ in and with his Body the Church." He quotes in this connection the remarkable assertion of the German exegete Heinrich Schlier, commenting on Paul's Letter to the Ephesians: "There is no sphere of being that is not also the Church's sphere. The Church is fundamentally di-

rected to the universe. Her boundaries are those of the universe. There is no realization of Christ's dominion without the Church or beyond her, no 'fulfillment' apart from her. The way in which the universe grows toward Christ is the way the Church grows."

TWO KINDS OF PRESENCE

If this is true, we must speak of two distinct ways in which the Church can be present and active. On the one hand, there is an institutional presence of the Church in historical continuity with the ministry of Christ its Founder. This presence implies an explicit profession of the Christian faith as channeled by Scripture and tradition, and normally includes sacramental forms of worship. But short of this, there is an active presence of the Church even among those who have not yet been confronted with the forms of creed and cult historically deriving from Jesus Christ. In this connection we might perhaps speak of an "anonymous Church," corresponding to the anonymous Christianity already mentioned.

How would such an anonymous Church come into being? As I have already mentioned, man is neither a pure spirit nor an isolated individual. He is a corporeal and social being. This means that the structure of his religious life, in agreement with the structure of his very being, will inevitably have a visible and communal aspect. Wherever anonymous Christianity is present, some kind of quasi-sacramental visibility will accompany it. In this way, as Schillebeeckx puts it, something of the Mystical Body is brought to visible realization, though only in a veiled manner. We have, as it were, a secret presence of the Church even where the spoken or written word of the gospel has not yet penetrated.

In this perspective we can better appreciate the significance of the non-Christian religions. Whenever men in society express their inner spiritual aspirations and intuitions by word and gesture, religious communities begin to take shape. Through myths and rituals and other symbolic forms the various religions of the world express in manifold ways man's unquenchable thirst

for union with the divine, his hope of salvation, his confidence in redemption. These themes are not confined to the biblical religions. In a special way, of course, Christ fulfilled the Israelite religion which providentially prepared the context of His own advent and career. But in a larger sense we can say that He, as the Incarnate Word, crowns all the religions of the world. The doctrinal and cultic life which characterizes these other religions is an adumbration and even an incipient presence of the Church of Christ.

The search for authentic human communion and fulfillment is not confined to organizations which are professedly religious. Men who labor for the building of international peace and brotherhood, or for social justice within any community, may be faithfully following the impulses of a divine and Christian charity. There is no strict line of demarcation between the Church and the world. They are not two spatially distinct societies, but two aspects of a single dynamic complex. Christians are not removed by their membership in the Church from full communion with the human family. Rather, they are that portion of mankind which has come to recognize Christ as Saviour of the world. The Church, therefore, stands where all mankind should be. "In the strict sense," writes Schillebeeckx, "the Church is mankind insofar as it willingly places itself under Christ's influence through faith and baptism, and 'helps its unbelief' at the common table of the eucharist."

CHURCH AND THE WORLD

So close are the relations between the Church and the world that it seems hardly possible to make a sharp distinction between their goals. If all mankind was created for salvation, and salvation means an authentic fellowship of men in the Body of Christ, the Church really exists to remind the world of its own nature and to help it achieve itself.

The borders between the Church and the world are forever shifting. The world, insofar as it draws near to God in Christ, becomes more and more the Church. And the Church, insofar as it forgets God and

falls into idolatry, becomes more and more the world—that world for which Christ would not pray. The aim of pastoral and missionary activity is to diffuse the Church in its full intensity, as broadly as may be, among all men, and in this sense to make the world become the Church. "The Church," as *Lumen gentium* expresses it, "simultaneously prays and labors in order that the entire world may become the People of God, the Body of the Lord, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, and that in Christ, the Head of all, there may be rendered to the Creator and Father of the universe all honor and glory" (n. 17).

THE LENGTH OF THE CHURCH

Let us now turn to the final "dimension"—the length of the Church. How long has it existed and how long is it destined to endure? Most Catholics would say that it came into being on Calvary or at Pentecost, and that it will last till the end of the world, since the gates of hell will not prevail against it. This answer would give the Church a respectable duration of some millennia, but it would still fail to do justice to the total importance of the Church in God's plan of creation. When the early Christian writer Hermas, writing in Rome about the end of the first century, described his visions, he reported that the Church appeared to him in the guise of a venerable old woman. "Why is she so elderly?" he asked the angel. "Because," came the reply, "she was created the first of all things. For this reason she is an old woman. And for her sake was the world established" (*Shepherd*, Vision 2, 4, 1). To consider the Church as if the age from Pentecost to the Parousia spanned its entire existence is as faulty as to define a plant as a mere stem without reference to its roots or its flower. We must consider the roots of the Church in its prehistory and its flowering in the posthistorical era that is to come.

As regards the origins of the Church, Vatican II took pains to stress that it did not begin abruptly with the coming of Christ, but that it had a long period of preparation, especially in God's dealings with Israel. In designating the Church as

the New Israel and especially as the People of God, the Council reminds us that the Church would be unintelligible unless seen against the Old Testament background. At several points the Vatican Constitution alludes to the familiar patristic theme of the Church as a reality which in some sort existed from the time of Abel, the just one. This realization that the Church of Christ stands in continuity with the earliest religious aspirations of the race should increase our sense of solidarity with the past and with that great portion of mankind who still stand in a situation comparable to the biblical people before the time of Abraham or Moses.

DESTINY OF THE CHURCH

Even more important for our idea of the Church is a realization of its future destiny. Many Catholics seem to forget that the Church really has a history. They think of it statically as if it were immune from change and incapable of progress. But if we look at the Church concretely and historically, rather than as an abstract essence, we shall see that it has a dramatic life story through the centuries. The picture of the Church as a pilgrim making its way through history is beautifully painted for us by Vatican II: "Moving forward through trial and tribulation, the Church is strengthened by the power of God's grace promised to it by the Lord, so that in the weakness of the flesh it may not waver in perfect fidelity, but remain a bride worthy of the Lord; that moved by the Holy Spirit it may never cease to renew itself, until through the Cross it arrives at the light which knows no setting" (n. 9).

One of the greatest achievements of the Constitution on the Church is to have restored the notion of the Church triumphant. To see the Church in this world as a pilgrim is already to raise the question, what is the goal of this march through the desert? What of the promised land? In chapter 7, inserted at the suggestion of Pope John XXIII, the Vatican Constitution firmly teaches that the Church will fully achieve itself in heaven. Most of us have been far too individualistic in our ideas about the

afterlife. We imagine that it will be a private affair between God and ourselves, in which other men, including Christ Himself, will play no vital part. Chapter 7, without saying anything radically new, gives what we may call an ecclesial context to Catholic eschatology. As Fr. Molinari has observed, "It is one of the outstanding merits of this chapter to have offered, for the first time in the history of dogma, a full and organic exposition of our union with the Church in heaven and to have placed it in its proper Christological and ecclesiological setting."

If we view the Church simply as pope, bishops, sacraments, and sermons, we shall find in our thinking no place for the Church triumphant. But we should look upon the Church, above all else, as the communion of saints with one another and, through Christ, with God. Then we shall be able to center our minds and hearts upon the thrilling promise with which chapter 7 concludes: "For when Christ shall appear and the glorious resurrection of the dead takes place, the splendor of God will brighten the heavenly city and the Lamb will be the lamp thereof. Then in the supreme happiness of charity the whole Church of the saints will adore God and 'the Lamb who was slain,' proclaiming with one voice: 'To him who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, blessing and honor and glory and dominion, forever and ever'" (n. 51).

CHRISTIANS AND THE WORLD

This eschatological hope should never detract from our loving concern for this world and its salvation. The gospel forbids us to cultivate a "contempt of the world" in this negative sense. Believers should be willing to spend themselves and be spent in order that the naked may be clothed and the hungry fed. But it would be no less an error to measure everything by its contribution to the city of man. We must never forget that "the form of this world is passing away." Amid all trials and distress the Christian is sustained by an assurance of a final kingdom which will be of God's making, and not man's alone. As the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, "we have not here a

lasting city but we look for one that is to come" (13:14). If we keep our hearts where our true treasure is, that is, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, we shall not be lacking in that courage, hope, and enthusiasm which the world has the right to expect from the convinced Christian. We shall have, thanks to our faith, an Archimedes' platform from which to raise the world toward God.

In this age of secular Christianity we need to keep reminding ourselves that man was not made for this life alone. It will do no good to build fairer cities on this earth if we do not at the same time help man find a path toward heaven. St. Augustine gave magnificent expression to the eschatological dimension of our hope and charity when he laid down the rule:

... we are to love what can be brought with us into those realms where no one says "my father," but where everyone addresses the one God as "our Father"; where no one says "my mother," but where everyone greets that Jerusalem as "our Mother"; where no

one says "my brother," but where everyone refers to everyone else as "our brother". . .

In a time of widespread suspicion and restlessness it is easy to become impatient with the complexities of the full Christian reality and to find oppositions and conflicts wherever there are tensions and contrasts. To avoid such imbalances, we need to keep our eyes open to the full dimensions of the Church, with all its surprising variety of aspects. It would be fatal to ignore either the institutional Church or the mystical Church, either the pilgrim Church or the triumphant Church, either the human Church or that which is of God. It would be disastrous to divide or separate what God has bound together. The Church is a great mystery, surpassing comprehension and must therefore be approached with reverence. Its inexhaustible riches provide endless matter for thought and exploration. If anyone feels hemmed in by the Church, he would do well to ask himself whether he has ever caught the vision of the full Church, the universal Church, the Catholic Church.

Church Renewal: Latin America

Ceslaus Hoinacki

The major seminary in Bogota, Colombia, desperately hangs on to its seven last students in the hope that they will remain until ordination. In Havana, on the other hand, 62 major seminarians are finishing their studies for the priesthood. Traditionally, strongly Catholic Colombia has been the Latin-American country rich in priestly vocations: last year, over a hundred young men were in the Bogota seminary. Now we find seven at the Bogota Seminary, 62 at Havana and yet we are told that the militantly socialist society of Cuba smothers the life of the Church. These facts and widely held assumptions indicate changes in the phenomenological or social reality of the

church's life for which we are not intellectually or theologically prepared.

Many North Americans hold the opinion that the Chilean church is the most dynamic and progressive in Latin America. But among those who have seriously questioned the fidelity of that church was the late president of CELAM, Bishop Manuel Larrain, the man rightly recognized by Americans as the outstanding personification of that church's real relevance. Speaking to a friend a couple of weeks before his accidental death, he stated that the church in Chile was failing in the fundamental task of evangelization. Bishop Larrain's judgment was truly typical of the prophetic in-

sights which characterized his life as an evangelical bishop.

In addition to having an "advanced" church, Chile is also the critical testing ground for Christian Democracy. At times, this particular political position is uncritically praised as *the* peaceful solution to revolutionary unrest, as *the* safe road to true social and economic reform, as *the* ideal setting for the life of the church. Dissonant voices speak in South America but are not always heard in the United States. The former vice-president of the Latin-American Young Christian Democrats organization maintains that a "Christian Political Party" is a contradiction in terms. As a real philosophy and program aimed at working out concrete political and social alternatives, this "ideal solution" can only lead to confusion and chaos. Ultimately, the goals neither of politics nor of Christianity will be achieved.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The Colombian, Cuban and Chilean churches, vis-a-vis the societies in which they live, haltingly grapple with the enormous and complex problem of the relations between church and society. But will and work are thwarted because of confusion in the understanding of the realities involved. The respective churches search for their own identity; men search for viable structures of political life; theologians search for a synthesis that is true to the visible presence announcing the kingdom and at the same time respectful of men freely committed to the political order.

Because many Catholics fearfully cling to a *clerical* church, real progress toward renewal in thought and action is often dissipated or paralyzed. The fact that the number of seminarians continues to decline drastically, and the number of priests leaving begins to increase rapidly, causes misplaced concern and alarm. And there are other less evident but more important factors involved. Observers are seriously concerned about the *human* qualities of many candidates who remain in the seminaries. Can these boys ever become the evangelical leaders the church needs? The feelings of frustration, real social irrelevance and

enervating despondency among priests who attempt to continue some kind of ministry become more deeply felt and widely dispersed. Meanwhile, the "ex-priests" include many of the most generous, intelligent and "committed" members of the clergy.

EXPERIMENTAL MINISTRY

But persons of courage, insight and vision have noted what is happening and have worked toward provisional solutions. Several years before Father Joseph Fichter made his survey on the priesthood in the United States, at least three distinct sociological studies—similar in approach and more "discouraging" in what they revealed—had been made in Brazil. Father Fichter had made another in Chile. Before the Council approved the married diaconate, a group of Brazilians had worked out a theological and pastoral description of a diaconate program for Brazil. These men, with a remarkable degree of clarity and accuracy, foresaw what would happen to a clerical church and began working toward a "new" concept of Christian ministry. They saw, for example, that the center of worship was in a spontaneous, creative celebration of the Word among a small group of people, presided over by a "lay" deacon. The emphasis was placed on active *communal celebration* rather than upon passively received sermons. Biblical studies, together with historical research on the early church, have shown that their tentative proposals were not so novel as some critics would try to make them.

One could easily cite many more such facts, studies and insights. In the resulting extensive list, one common characteristic would shine out: The Latin-American church is experiencing a marvelous and rich variety of new "happenings." An exciting and complex confrontation with social reality is beginning to *renew* this church. To an amazing degree, members of the church are sensitive to these new experiences and are working to interpret and evaluate them.

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Through patient reflection upon what the church is living, basic concepts concerning ministry in the church, the process of evangelization, the very nature of the church itself, are being enriched and, in a real sense, *changed*. The evangelization experiments carried out by Bishop Proano in Riobamba, Ecuador, are an excellent example. In the diocese of Cuernavaca, Mexico, one sees an emphasis placed upon the joyful celebration of the *community*, rather than upon total attendance at Mass. Each Sunday, a number of priests concelebrate with the bishop at a Mass that has become internationally famous. Yet there is a real "shortage" of priests in the diocese. These changes are more easily understood when one sees the extent and profundity of change in Latin-American society. When this radical process is further advanced and comes to be fully recognized and understood, the universal church will find itself indebted to the Latin church.

TENTATIVE SOLUTIONS

In this dynamic growth there is one great agonizing need: mature theological orientation. Sensitive members of the church find themselves in concrete circumstances that urgently demand new avenues of approach which traditional and contemporary theological expression simply cannot provide. In Latin America, as in other areas of the world, a deep, wide and obscure gap lies between any kind of theological consensus at our disposal and the numerous socioevangelical problems facing us. The encouraging light in an otherwise dark night is the large number of imaginative and courageous persons thoroughly aware of the problems, hard at work on provisional hypotheses and tentative solutions. Their visionary thinking and bold experiments are already beginning to take meaningful form. A new understanding of *how* the church celebrates the sacrament of marriage has been aided by the practice of "blessing" marriages years after the consensual union has matured and been perfected. We see that the church need not, and *should* not, continue as a kind of subsidiary agent for a justice of the peace.

Because of their faith in the Word, these men are absolutely committed to the evangelical principle of not fearing to take a risk. They are not afraid of making a mistake. They know that the Spirit lives and manifests himself in the faith and action of the Christian people, in *all* believers. Any stupid, irrelevant or erroneous position will eventually be shown up for what it is. The churches' faith will expose it. In the meantime, initiative and experiment must be carried out. These men strive to be true to their consciences, the ultimate source for their subjective, contingent judgments. They know that their decisions, different formulations of Christian truths, new approaches in concrete action demand a later judgment by the faith of the churches.

TWO-FOLD DANGER

The *real* danger in experimentation is twofold: First, because competent, effective machinery to guide and supervise study and innovation is simply inoperative, overly impatient and poorly trained reformers hastily justify superficial practical solutions based on a misunderstanding of some of the opinions of contemporary theologians. Secondly, many authorities, insensitive to the urgency of the situation, become hardened into an immobile fear of *all* experiment because of the rashness and theological weakness of some innovators. The former find here a further justification for seeing renewal in terms of patchwork and adjustment.

Bishops have repressed innovators and relegated them to posts where their voices, in the estimation of the authorities, would not be heard, or would be ineffectual. Where such means were thought necessary—and possible—the bureaucratic machine has expelled these men from the countries where they were working. Such was the fate of the rectors of the major seminaries in Lima and Bogota. In Bogota, the rector was "guilty" of promoting pastoral and work experience for the seminarians during their vacations. Men who look beyond "traditional" (it is sometimes amusing to see what is defended as traditional) formulation of what is conceived as doctrine, fall under suspicion, are accused of heresy and sometimes even are judged to be possessed by

the devil. (This last occurred again recently, in Don Matias, Colombia.)

When experimenters speak out, whether in gentle or strident voices, they can never forget that the most humble prophetic judgment is always subject to the immediate threat of condemnation and repression. The authority structure, in many instances, will not even attempt to listen to what is being said before it judges. A promising young priest in Peru was expelled from the country. The occasion: his refusal to play the guitar and sing at performances planned for raising money for more church-building in that country. His request to explain the reasoning behind his decision was simply ignored. In various dioceses of Colombia, some of the best trained priests in Latin America are denied all access to their ordinaries when the former wish to discuss positive changes in the structure of their church. Of course, the genuine Christian fool is not astonished or hurt by this kind of reaction. He has read the prophets.

TRIALS OF RENEWAL

Any attempt to judge as malicious the repressive action of ecclesiastical authorities, be they Latin American, European, North American, is both unnecessary and irrelevant. Condemnations, repressions, removals, suspensions and the whole gamut of official disapprobation of initiative can be most helpful for true renewal in the church. Many of the critics and innovators see quite clearly what needs to be reformed—or better, discarded—in present structural forms, attitudes, and pastoral orientation. But no one of the reformers pretends to have any absolute or sure-fire solutions. They know that their positive suggestions and approaches are in the nature of hypotheses—highly tentative, in need of continual clarification, revision and refinement. Any criticisms of these reformers, no matter how blind, arbitrary or prejudicial, forces them to demonstrate more precisely the truth of their insights and proposals. One then can easily see the difference between the true reformer and the fanatic.

The true agents of radical renewal have a real sense of history and deep concern for fidelity. They realize the speed at which

societal structures are changing today. They see the institutional church unable to relate to, much less move with or ahead of, the real society of men. They know that the institution, of necessity, will always lag behind. But with equal necessity, it must provide the possibility for the individual to be truly *free* in his prophetic function. Today, the tragedy is that the institution expects the prophet to use words and gestures which are irrelevant, precisely because they are outdated or too late.

CHANGING WORLD

A casual analysis of the persons involved and the lives they live helps explain the bind in which the church is constrained. The innovators (many of them laymen) *live* the rapid and convulsive movement of their society. This is the crucial differentiating factor between many ecclesiastical bureaucrats and those at the bottom of the intricate hierarchial maze. The hierarchy often live in another world, literally removed—socially, psychologically and physically—from the real order of events. One understands why such men assume, in good faith, the most ridiculous positions when they are faced with circumstances which obviously demand a wholly different approach. Christians sensitive to what is happening in society, especially in those sectors which are most vital and active today, would be mistaken if they expected any other kind of reaction from the authority structure.

But one need not always take with total seriousness the repressive actions of middle and high ranking defenders of the faith. Attempts to make Christ's Gospel the pretext for social respectability, political infighting and bureaucratic climbing in the ecclesiastical superstructure are quite ludicrous. Reformers, striving to renew a truly useless status quo and reprimanded for their efforts, can only smile when they are made the objects of such pastoral concern. Frequently, a sign of real hope and faith is manifested in a sense of humor concerning authority.

The marvelous and encouraging exceptions to this pattern are one of the really important sources of hope. Even the superficially informed have some knowledge, from

an outstanding conciliar performance, of the quality of a small, but important group of Latin-American bishops. Intellectually and theologically, they constitute a real elite. The level of their competence and the measure of their contact with reality were illustrated in an interview between Dom Helder Camara, Archbishop of Recife, Brazil, and the late Cardinal Meyer, after the second session of the Council. Dom Helder asked the Cardinal for theological assistance to improve the Brazilian proposal concerning the church and society. This document had been composed principally by Brazilian laymen, notably Marina Bandeira and Candido Mendez de Almeda. The Cardinal answered that he had no theologians capable of the task. "But you are sitting on the top of the modern world," said Dom Helder. "You are the man uniquely fitted to contribute something significant to this crucial frontier area . . ." But the North American church was not yet prepared to speak.

UNPREPARED FOR NEW FUNCTIONS

Another important factor operates here. Both reformers and authorities are unaccustomed to and unprepared for their respective functions in the church today. No one in the church knows what to do with or how to react to the charisms of the Spirit. These are clearly mentioned in the *Constitution on the Church*, but confusion surrounds their discernment and operation. Also, prophetic judgments on the church as institution have been a relatively uncommon phenomenon in Latin America. And the Christian today, inspired to act under the gifts of the Spirit, has not even been told that such action is possible in the church. Theologically or catechetically, he has never been instructed in this aspect of the reality of Christ's presence in the world. Since he is a man after all, this strongly affects his sensitivity to the Spirit — or more likely, his lack of it. Like Samuel, he has not been given any guidelines for recognizing the voice of the Lord. Unfortunately, many authorities lack the relatively quick understanding of Eli. In their subjective psychological attitudes, they have

difficulty admitting that the Lord can speak today. How could they make an authoritative judgment — their proper function — on the authenticity of the voice? The situation is further complicated by the fact that one must relate charisms to the concrete historical dimension of a community which is uncertain of its own changing identity.

RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTATION

Any effort toward integral renewal, a renewal that will be faithful to the Spirit and to men in society, must encompass serious research and imaginative experimentation. Only thus, shall we arrive at formulations and practices which will merit being submitted to the judgment of the hierarchy. To begin to fill the intellectual gap and to live a Christian life in forms unexplored up to now, certain groups dedicate themselves to the serious study of the churches in contemporary society and to experimentation with common study, work, prayer and living. Among these is CIDOC (Center of Intercultural Documentation), in Cuernavaca, Mexico. About five years ago, CIDOC tried to interest various groups of religious superiors in the theological study of religious consecration in the church. It was already clear, then, that the "official" church was "losing" its faith in the ability of a person to consecrate himself irrevocably to God. Today, we see this problematic situation reflected in the confusion and insecurity of the large numbers of religious who ask for their dispensations.

Two years ago CIDOC sponsored a sociological study of the conflict situations in the priesthood today. At that time, perceptive persons were calmly conscious of the problems and saw what was happening among the clergy. Today, the entire church sees and lives a crisis situation. At the time of the study, sufficient official interest and help could not be found to search for solutions to problems which were becoming increasingly pressing and widespread. Today, many authorities, when they do not completely ignore the problems, still take fright, retreat from the real world and insist on a blind faith, "defended" by arguments of

convenience or patently untenable myths.

The liberty of a "Catholic" institution is strictly enclosed within very tight limits. This is not new. But increasingly, both individuals and institutions question the nature and extent of hierarchial control. Individuals feel the necessity to speak and act regarding positions and policies which fail man, or lack fidelity to the Gospel. The point at issue is this: The church, desiring to listen to the Spirit, needs the free and independent voice of persons who still accept the church. This can result in conflict, because a *bureaucratic* church feels that it is being threatened and attacked, and will react accordingly. A major source of trouble here is that hierarchic positions have been filled by temporally oriented bureaucrats. Oftentimes, it is the legalist-minded administrator, rather than the evangelically minded pastor, who has hierarchic power. Happily, the Latin-American church is blessed in possessing a good number of pastorally qualified bishops who manage to function as bureaucrats.

HUMILITY AND A NEW FREEDOM

Today, those who feel the imperative need to criticize, to point out, to prophesy, must learn a new humility in order to live their faith and to serve. This virtue will in turn free them, bring them a new independence, the scope of which they had never dreamed possible. Of course, it also means that they must be ready to accept the rebukes and repressions of officialdom. They must learn to what extent the church is an institution, a human power and prestige organization. We may not like this. We may not want to accept it. But in order to be faithful to the grain of evangelical truth found in the sometimes tortuous intrigues, deceptions and iron fists of bureaucratic functionaries, those who remain within the jurisdictional church must strive for an attitude of humble realism.

Both those at the top and those at the bottom act out of love for the church. Indi-

viduals at all levels in the institution must be prepared to accept *more* rather than *fewer* rebukes. Of their very nature, things which must be said and positions which must be taken today in this transitional period of profound de-clericalization run counter to the collective vested interests of a bureaucratic system. In the first place, we must ask some hard questions. In the church today, does a new vocation exist, in the living of which, a person *deeply* faithful to the church lives to witness against the bureaucracy? (I am again reminded of Dom Helder Camara who, when called before the Holy Office to reply to a series of ridiculous accusations, simply refused to answer and walked out.) Can the exercise of bureaucratic, temporal governing power be identified in *any* way with the exercise of hierarchial episcopal authority in the church? Are the powers of coercion and the duties of administration in *any* way related to the functions of teaching and life-giving? Is there any *real* difference between the secretary of an episcopal conference and a bank clerk?

INSTITUTION AND PROPHETIC ROLES

The task is not to reject the hierarchy of the church as institution. The accumulated weight of centuries of politicking, privileges and hypocrisies may make the institution hopelessly anachronistic in today's real society. But this is not the point which concerns us directly. The pressing need is a twofold attitude: simple, unapologetic acceptance of the church as institution; and grateful, humble acceptance of our prophetic role with this institution. The first attitude may prove embarrassing in the presence of our non-Christian friends, and the second painful in the presence of non-believing ecclesiastics. One thing is certain: Acting thus, one will never advance personally in the church, either as career or as persecuted liberal. But the *whole* church may advance significantly on the rocky road of renewal.

Books Received

The Mystery of the Church

John Powell, S.J.

Bruce. Cloth, \$5.95. Paper, \$2.50

This is the latest addition to Bruce's "The Contemporary College Theology Series." And it reflects the same high standards of the previous volumes in this collection. While of special importance to college students, it can be read with profit by anyone concerned with a renewed appreciation of the nature, mission and destiny of the Church in this post-Vatican era.

In thirteen chapters, it describes the Church as portrayed in the Council's documents and as seen by the literature of the renewed theology. Always in the forefront of the author's mind are the questions, doubts and difficulties of young "restless" believers. A chapter on "The Changing Concept of the Church" (which is a gem) leads to treatments of the Church as mystery, the biblical images, and as Sacrament—with a discussion of the Church in the world, its historical foundation and its authority.

These are followed by a good look at matters like public opinion and its expression in the Church, the Liturgy, Church and State, Holiness and the position of the laity and religious among God's People. It is a highly satisfactory book and deserves wide attention.

The Four Gospels

An Introduction

Bruce Vawter, C.M.

Doubleday, \$5.95

Readers of Father Vawter's previous books, like his book on Genesis or that on the Prophets, know him to be a knowledgeable expert who has the knack of making his scholarship understandable to the ordinary reader. His present book manifests these qualities at work on the Gospels, the central books of Scripture.

He disavows any intention of offering a commentary on these four books but

rather an explanation of what they are saying to us. Technical exegesis and doctrinal difficulties, while not neglected, are topics the reader finds in detail elsewhere. The setting he provides, however, is an indispensable step for those who wish to examine particular points in greater depth.

His method is one of harmonizing all four Gospels and their message. He begins with the prologue to the fourth gospel and concludes with the Resurrection as told by all the evangelists. He advises the reader to concentrate mainly on the Gospels themselves as he reads the author's explanation. This has the effect of meeting the persons, events and words of the Gospel—with a sympathetic, informed teacher at your elbow just when you need him.

A chapter on "Some Preliminaries" summarizes the conclusions of current research on the Gospels and the men who wrote them. The writer explains form criticism, the land of Palestine in Christ's time, and the distinctive features of each Gospel. He shows clearly that the Gospels are not and were never intended to be a biography of the Lord in the modern sense of a life of a prominent man. Yet he makes plain "That the Gospels are historical documents of a high order."

Anyone who reads this book along with the Gospel text will have a most rewarding experience. Yet those who lack the time to follow this plan will be amply enriched by this excellent book. This reviewer particularly enjoyed the treatment of the infancy narratives and the chapters "Joy to the World," "Living Water," "That They Who Do Not See May See," and "Fire On Earth."

A reading of Father Vawter's book will inform and deepen the conviction that "the Gospels have never left us in doubt as to what is the real heart of the great mystery. . . . The risen Christ is to be seen in the members of his Church: this is not only the Church's glory, but also its imperative call to holiness and to showing forth the God whom it incarnates."

The Pilgrim Church
George H. Tavard
Herder and Herder. \$4.95

Father Tavard in what he modestly calls an "essay" on the "Vatican Council's ecclesiology," undertakes an "initiation" into "some of the major themes of the Constitution on the Church." It is his aim to provide a truly theological reflection which avoids excitement and extremism, whether left or right, with "serenity in assessing the *Kairos* of Vatican II."

The heart of the book explains some of the central themes of the Constitution. Penetrating insights are given regarding the Mystery of the Church, the People of God and the Hierarchy. Other sections dwell on the Church and the Kingdom, Religious in the Church and The Mystery of the Church in the Liturgical Constitution.

A particularly illuminating chapter is entitled "The Theological Setting of the Vatican Council." It traces the development of the renewed theology, especially during the last quarter century. This chapter treats of the fortunes and work of the gifted scholars without which Vatican II might have been an entirely different Council. It makes mighty interesting reading indeed.

A New Catechism:
Catholic Faith for Adults
Herder and Herder. \$6.00

Dutch Catholicism has emerged as a particularly vital element in the Church. And this authorized edition in English of the famous "Dutch Catechism" is another evidence of the distinguished service rendered to the Church under the vigorous leadership of Cardinal Alfrink and his brothers in the Dutch hierarchy.

Catechists the world over have concluded that a pressing contemporary need is an adult presentation of Catholicism. Catechism answers, memorized in childhood, are not sufficient to nourish the living faith required for our tempestuous times. The needs of the times, the problems of the mature Catholic, the new point of view towards the enduring gifts of Christ endorsed at Vatican II—these motivated the writers of this manual.

And the result is an extraordinarily good piece of work. It combines the best ideals of the catechetical revival admirably. It succeeds in blending the rich sources that should be applied to any particular topic: biblical, doctrinal, liturgical, moral and their practical application to daily living. For the professional manner in which this task was undertaken and so successfully completed, working catechists and preachers will be deeply grateful. They now have a single source which will be eminently serviceable.

Various aspects of the work are particularly noteworthy. It is straightforward in facing the real difficulties of the grown-up believer; recognizes that we walk by faith, not by sight; and avoids the glib answer to life's perplexing problems. It provides the understanding requisite for participation in the Church's worship, and its emphasis on the place of prayer in the Christian life is pervasive.

The element of community is stressed emphatically. And matters that engage the attention of our best theologians — like the Eucharist, family limitation, devotion to Mary and the Virgin birth are discussed with frankness and reflect the newer theological thinking. The New Catechism should stimulate healthy discussion on these topics.

J.T.M.

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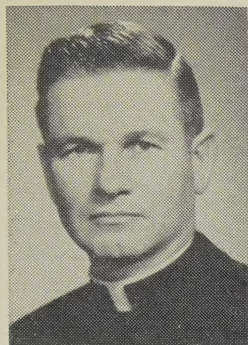
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(signed) John T. McGinn, Editor



Guide Lights

THE FRENCH EXPERIMENT . . .

Some years back when the pastoral catechists in France were breaking new ground in so many directions, the concept of sponsor received a good deal of attention. As I recall it, the burden of responsibility in the early stages of the catechumen's approach to the Church lay with this doughty individual. He was the person who accompanied the seeker after faith on his lonely and difficult way and he was the one who was both tutor and judge of his progress.

It always seemed to me that there was something very important and basic in this concept but it never quite took hold in this country and I am not sure that it ever will,—at least not in the same way that the French applied it. However, in listening to the new winds that are sighing (and there is a kind of yearning in them that justifies that word) through the forests of religious education, it is possible that there may now be a significant role for the sponsor principle in the American parish.

A GROUP SPONSORSHIP . . .

More specifically, the current emphasis on experience, both contemporary and personal, as a prime arena of revelation and encounter points to the value of placing an inquirer in a group of Christians oriented toward personal growth and action as a specially good point of entry into the life of the Church. A parish discussion group that is coming to grips with the realities of modern life and endeavoring to locate themselves within them in some way that is meaningfully Christian would seem to offer a special affinity for the man who is searching out his true self. They would be speaking a language he understands and, if they

are really wrestling with reality, he should feel right at home.

I stress the experimental and contemporary quality of the project he joins because in most cases it would probably be a mistake to throw him into one occupied with specifically religious learning. He needs some human preparation for this first, i.e., he needs to have identified for him something of what he is experiencing here and now. It will be a strong temptation to do just this because we are so instruction minded, but in the long run we would be doing him no favor. The religious shape of a man's life comes as much from within as without and only the man himself can bring forth the precious ingredients God has supplied over his lifetime. This is not necessarily an orderly process nor one that is susceptible to scheduling. That is why the sponsor concept is so appealing.

AN OPEN FUTURE . . .

In the French experiment, the period of sponsorship was open and varied with the progress of the individual. It often went on for years because it often took years for a person to discover his Christian vocation in the tangle that so much of life becomes. There is a good deal of straight humanizing that often must come first and it is the task of the sponsor, to the extent that he is able, to assist the catechumen in this difficult passage.

It is a lot to ask of a single human being and I wonder if better results can't be expected where a group undertakes the task. We have already seen so much in the way of effective personal development through group participation in the cursillo, in CFM, in Encounter groups and the like, that we have every reason to expect some impressive showing in the application of the concept of sponsorship to a group as well. It doesn't have to be a very formal

sponsorship, at least not in the early stages, —all that is really required is a sense of belonging in some way to the Church by the catechumen on his part, and a sense of being responsible for him on behalf of the Church by the group.

THE CATECHUMENATE REVISED . . .

In order to provide a rough outline for his progress, a glance over the shoulder at our old familiar phases of pre-evangelization, evangelization and catechesis may be of help.

What has been described above roughly compares with what we used to call pre-evangelization. The ground is being prepared for the gospel. The points of connection will emerge when the catechumen on his own begins to propose religious questions that are real to him. At this point, whenever it comes, he might well move into another group of believers that are occupied with religious material. Here again, the time and subject matter are fluid but it can be presumed that by now he has some sense of where he is going and is therefore in a position to contribute toward planning his own curriculum.

The major decisive step comes when he finds himself ready to make his association with the parish permanent, — when he wants to join. By now it should be evident to all concerned, including himself, that the sponsor groups who have shared his journey have something to say about his decision. Here, the exercise of sponsorship is very real and can help make his baptismal commitment a truly ecclesial step.

CHRISTIAN INITIATION . . .

If the people of God concur in his estimate, then he should be immediately enrolled in the catechumenate and begin his liturgical initiation into the community at the same time that he continues his religious instruction. Here again, flexibility should be the keynote as the length of time he spends here will vary depending upon how much he has absorbed in the previous phases. However, this should not pose enormous practical problems of overlap and extra effort by the parish priest. It should be evident that the groups do almost all the work and if they are active and numerous they can assimilate many catechumens

any time that they present themselves. There is no formal curriculum for experience and anyone should feel at home with the subject at any time he enters a group. There will have to be adjustment within the groups, of course, but here is where the element of Christian sharing that is involved in sponsorship makes its particular demands.

ABOUT THE PRACTICABILITY OF ALL THIS . . .

Naturally, there are problems involved. The most obvious is the situation where there are no groups in the parish that answer the descriptions above. In such a case, obviously there can be no sponsorship, but if the parish is concerned to start along these lines, then one should begin with the Catholics and aid and encourage them to form such groups for their own sake. As they develop and derive internal strength they will turn outward to others and this program then becomes practicable.

There is the problem of convincing people that such a leisurely pace of entry into the Church is not a waste of time. This will be difficult but I think a session or two in the group itself on this matter might help the catechumen discover that the rhythms of spiritual response are not necessarily the same as some of his business and social reflexes.

Finally, in case this sounds like an awful lot of talk in a parish, there is something wrong if it doesn't lead to action. And whatever service activity any group eventually comes to should be thrown open to the catechumen as well. Extending a share in the "action" is as much a part of group sponsorship as inviting the newcomer into the circle of discussion. A person doesn't have to become a Catholic first in order to serve his fellow man. Indeed, it may well be that through the experience of Christian mission the discovery of his Christian self will come about with a depth and clarity that no amount of instruction or talk could possibly match. So, it is not any form of religious dilettantism that is here described but rather an exercise in self-direction by concerned adults toward personal growth and action in obedience to the Gospel. Wouldn't this be a wonderful way to help new believers identify with the Church?

JOSEPH V. GALLAGHER, C.S.P.